

Troopers Hill & Crews Hole



Who's Who

A list of local residents and others who have been involved in the history of Troopers Hill and the surrounding area over the years. These are people who have cropped up during our research. Please let us know of anyone you think should be added.

Joseph John Ballard (1846-1936) - of Holly Lodge, St George - owner of Troopers Hill from 5th September 1924 until his death on 21st April 1936. In his early career JJ Ballard was at different times, an engineer, licensee and then a builder. He seems to have become something of a property developer and the owner of a large number of properties that were rented out. Holly Lodge was originally the home of *Handel Cossham*. JJ Ballard became a member of the St George Local Board. Through his property interests he became involved in a number of disputes that went to court, including a dispute in 1928 over the right of way over part of Troopers Hill to Apricot House, Rosary Cottage and Hillside Cottage. [Wikitree entry](#)

Joseph William Ballard (1874 - 1949) - owner of Troopers Hill from his father's death on 21st April 1936 to 3rd April 1948 when it was sold to *Frank Viner*

GW Braikenridge (1775–1856) - born in the Colony of Virginia, but lived for most of his life in Bristol, England, where he created a large collection of Bristolian historical and topographical material known as the Braikenridge Collection. It contains over 1400 drawings and watercolours of Bristol landscapes and buildings. Included in his collection is a drawing of Troopers Hill Chimney in 1826. [Wikipedia entry](#). [More...](#)

William Butler (1819-1900) - William Butler was appointed as manager of the Tar Works in Crews Hole from the start of operations (or at least from very early on) though he moved to set up his own Tar Distillery in Gloucester in 1860. He had previously been employed on the Bristol and Exeter Railway so it is possible that Brunel (or possibly *George Henet*) was responsible for his appointment. In 1863 a fire broke out that nearly destroyed the plant and Robert & Daines then sold the works to William Butler who returned to Bristol and operated the plant under the name of William Butler & Co Ltd along with the Gloucester works.

The Butler family lived at Summerhill House. William Butler became Chair of the St George Local Board and later Bristol Tramways. He gave money to support the community in St George in various ways and was a particular supporter of the Methodist Chapels. Butlers organised many events & outings for their employees, pensioners and residents of the area.

William Butler's sons and then grandson took over the business on his retirement and the Tar Works remained in the control of the Butler family until 1962. [More...](#)

William Henry Butler (1850-1931) – son of *William Butler*, joined the Butler Co in 1868 and became chairman on the death of his father.

Joseph Beaumont Butler (1857-1935) – son of *William Butler*, joined the Butler Co in 1873 and became chairman in 1927 taking over from his brother. He joined the Bristol Rifles at an early age and attained the rank of Lt. Colonel serving in the Boer War and the First World War

Thomas Butler (1861-1931) – son of *William Butler*, joined the Butler Co in 1878. He owned the first motor car registered in Bristol – AE1.

Thomas Howard Butler (1887-1959) – son of *Thomas Butler*, joined the Butler Co in 1909 as works chemist and then works manager. He became chairman in 1935. Known as T Howard Butler, he wrote 'The History of Wm Butler & Co (Bristol) Ltd 1843 to 1943' which was published in 1953.

Handel Cossham (1824-1890) - Cossham began his involvement in the coal industry in 1845 at Yate colliery. He began Parkfield Colliery at Pucklechurch in 1851 and then several other coal pits in East Bristol initially under the name of Cossham and Wethered Ltd then the Kingswood Coal and Iron Company Ltd and then from 1879 the Kingswood and Parkfield Colliery Company Ltd. His collieries included Speedwell Pit (formerly Starveall Coal Works, Starveall being the name shown on the 1840 Tithe map for Speedwell).

Cossham was involved in local politics in St George including on the St George Local Board. At one meeting it was claimed that both he and *William Butler* wanted to be kings – “one The King of Crew’s Hole and the other the King of Star Vale [Starveall]”. At the 1885 general election he was elected Member of Parliament (MP) for the newly created Bristol East and retained the seat in 1886. His victory in 1885 led to a big celebration on Troopers Hill.

[Wikipedia entry.](#) [More...](#)

Lancelot Dobson - of Patterdale, Yeoman, Westmoorland – sold Troopers Hill (part, 10 acres) to *Sir Abraham Elton* in 1704.

Sir Abraham Elton (1654 – 1728) (created 1st Baronet 1717) – purchased Troopers Hill (part, 10 acres) from *Lancelot Dobson* in 1704. Active in the slave trade. Established a copper smelting works at Conham in about 1698 he was Mayor of and Member of Parliament for Bristol and Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers.

[Wikipedia entry.](#) [More...](#)

Sir Abraham Elton 2nd Baronet (1679 – 1742) – owned Troopers Hill from the death of his father in 1728 until his death in 1742 Active in the slave trade and invested in slave ships. Mayor of and Member of Parliament for Bristol and Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers. [Wikipedia entry.](#)

Sir Abraham Elton 3rd Baronet – sold Troopers Hill to the United Company, the Brass Battery Wire and Copper Co of Bristol, Esher, Upper Redbrook and Barton Regis in 1758

Sir Thomas Fairfax (1612-1671) - Local tradition has it that during the English Civil War, the Parliamentary army, under the command of Sir Thomas Fairfax, camped on Troopers Hill prior the siege of Bristol in 1645. [Wikipedia entry.](#)

Arthur Friend - In the 1930s and 40s Hillside Cottage was occupied by Arthur and Annie Friend who had married in 1900. They had eight children one of whom was Doris. [More...](#)

Tom R Fry (b1902) - used to live on Air Balloon Rd, Friends of Troopers Hill were lent a copy of a document hand written by him describing the industrial heritage of Crews Hole and his memories of the area which included several sketches. Tom Fry was appointed research assistant to Prof. Whittard, Channing Wills Professor of Geology, University of Bristol, in 1947 and the University awarded him the honorary degree of M.Sc. in 1968. [More...](#)

George Hennett (1799–1857) - a major contractor working for IK Brunel on the construction of railways and other works in the south-west of England and elsewhere. He was involved in setting up the tar works in Crews Hole in 1843 and it seems likely that *William Butler* was working for George Hennett rather than directly for Brunel when he started managing the site. [Wikipedia entry.](#) [More...](#)

Elizabeth Holmes (née Emra) (1804-1843) - Elizabeth Emra, or 'Little Elizabeth', was the author of "Scenes in our Parish" which was first published in 1830 by J. Chilcott, Bristol. Elizabeth was not named as the author in the early editions, they were described as being by 'A Country Parson's Daughter'. Elizabeth's father was John Emra, vicar at St George Church from 1809-1842. According to a biographical sketch of Elizabeth's son first published in 1877 'the Rev. John Emra, vicar of St George's, Bristol, was the son of a slave-owner, a native of the Island of St Christopher [St Kitts], West Indies.

Scenes in our Parish gives a fascinating insight into life and death (mostly death) in the 1830s in St George it describes ""the barren and quarried hill, with its yellow spots of gorse and broom, and its purple shade of heath". [More...](#)

James Limb (1797-1879) - The probate papers of James Limb detail him as Workman at lead works and late of the White House in St George. James was born in Derbyshire, he was a lead smelter on the Mendips then in Devonshire before he moved to Crews Hole, he had links to *Dr Benjamin Somers*. There is a family story that at one time was Steward at the White House. [More...](#)

James Walter Albert Limb (b1836) - third son of James Limb of the White House, born 1836 in Burrington. He later apparently became the publican of the Hit or Miss Beerhouse in Crews Hole and is recorded at Crews Hole in the 1871 & 1881 census. He also had a son named James Walter Albert Limb (born 1861) who was recorded in the 1911 census as living at the Hit or Miss Cottage in Crews Hole with his family. [More...](#)

James Michell (d1862) - came to Crews Hole in 1853 to reprocess the slag left by the earlier working, said to be 130 years old. He probably brought with him knowledge from his lead smelting experiences in Spain and Derbyshire but after 3 years (June 1853 to August 1856) Michell declared himself bankrupt. He was involved in copper mining at Alderley Edge in Cheshire in the 1860s and died in an accident in a Cheshire pit where he slipped and fell 30 feet to the bottom of a shaft. [More...](#)

Dr Benjamin Somers (1784 -1848) – purchased Troopers Hill from the Bristol Brass Co in 1828. Registered a patent 'for improvements on furnaces for smelting different kinds of metals, ores &c.' in 1827. According to 'Industrial Archaeology of The Bristol Region' written by Angus Buchanan & Neil Cossons in 1969, 'Dr Benjamin Somers had a brick smelting-house erected for re-working old slag and slimes' at Charterhouse in the Mendips in 1824'. He is listed as the occupier of part of the leadworks in Blackswarth in the 1840s Tithe apportionments. He was also involved briefly with The Tamar Smelting Works in Devon. In the early 1840s as he bought Mendip Lodge (which was a very large house and included what is now Dolebury Warren Nature Reserve in its extensive estate). Dr Benjamin Somers died in 1848 leaving the house to his wife, Mary, for the use of their son, Thomas Somers. [More...](#)

Thomas Somers (1813-1862) – son of *Dr Benjamin Somers*, became owner of Troopers Hill following his father's death. Married Elizabeth Williams and their son, Benjamin Edward, was born at Mendip Lodge in 1851

Elizabeth Somers (1818-1900) – Wife of *Thomas Somers*, acted as owner of Troopers Hill following her husband's death. Gave permission for the smallpox hospital to be built on the Hill in 1888. [More...](#)

Benjamin Edward Somers (1851-1934) – sold Troopers Hill to *J J Ballard* on 5th September 1924. Son of *Thomas & Elizabeth Somers* and grandson of *Dr Benjamin Somers* [More...](#)

Thomas Stone (d1905) – of (at the time of his death) Cote House, Tyndall's Park Rd, Tyndall's Park. Owner of Stone & Tinson (Conham Chemical Works) which used the chimney on Troopers Hill in the period before the First World War. Shares in the Conham Chemical Works were offered for sale in 1891 with Thomas William Stone & Francis Joseph Stone listed as directors. The works were in operation by a least 1877 when 'Stone & Tinson chemical manufacturers. Crew's Hole near Bristol' was listed under "Partnerships dissolved" on Lloyd's List. In his will Thomas Stone left an estate valued at £19,647 7s 5d and left his business to his two sons. The company continued in operation until at least 1913.

Archibald Vickers (1799?-1879) – Manager of the Great Western Cotton Factory in Barton Hill for approximately 10 years from around 1855. Very much involved in the Wesleyan Methodist Church laying the foundation stone for Wesleyan Chapel on Crews Hole Rd on 10th September 1860 and being presented with a silver trowel. He was originally from the Stockport area and had managed a mill at Waterside, near Disley in Cheshire

before moving to Bristol. On 30th January 1863 at an Anti-slavery meeting in the Broadmead Rooms, Vickers denounced Abraham Lincoln's anti-slavery policy as "partial, inhuman, revengeful and altogether opposed to those high and noble principles of State policy which alone should guide the counsels of a great people" – this was during the American Civil War at a time when the disruption of cotton supplies "the cotton famine" was causing great hardship for his employees at the Cotton Factory.

Frank Viner - of Whites Hill Farm, Kingsway – owner of Troopers Hill 3rd April 1948 to 14th September 1956 when he sold the Hill to Bristol City Council for £600.

Robert Inkerman Weight (1855-1909) – a licensed victualler and lead smelter of Sandown Villa, Summerhill Rd. He was licensee at the Hit or Miss, Crews Hole in 1886/7 and then at the Pied Horse and the Don Johns Cross. He was a member of St George Local Board and then the St George District Council and various other local organisations. On 12th November 1909 he died in a shooting accident in Wiltshire aged 54 – he accidentally shot himself with his shotgun while climbing over a hedge. [More...](#)

Troopers Hill Historical Research

The following have provided research that has been invaluable in putting together the history of the Hill.

Joan Day (1928-2019) - Much of what is known about the Bristol brass industry was discovered by local expert the late Joan Day who wrote 'Bristol Brass: The History of the Industry' in the 1970s and was the leading force in the restoration of the Saltford Mill. Joan gave a talk to Friends of Troopers Hill in July 2004. [Obituary](#). [More...](#)

John Cornwell (d 2006) – the late John Cornwell ran the Bristol Coal Mining Archives and wrote 'The Bristol Coalfield' which described the history of coalmining in the area. John kindly met with Friends of Troopers Hill to talk about the area shortly before his death. [Obituary](#). [More...](#)

Raymond Holland (d 2018) - worked at the tar works for around 20 years from 1961. Raymond wrote a paper published by the Society of Chemical Industry under the title 'A History of Tar Distillation at Crew's Hole, Bristol' and gave a talk based on his paper to the St George History Group in September 2009. He also shared some of his photographs with Friends of Troopers Hill. 'The Butlers & the Coal-Tar Distillery at Crew's Hole' by Brian Vincent and Raymond Holland (ALHA Books) was published after his death. [More...](#)

William Sanigar (1882-1959) – lived at 205 Avonvale Road, he attended St. George Higher Grade School. He became a well-respected historian and his knowledge of the history of the area was immense. He wrote several books and many letters to local newspapers. His papers are in the Bristol Records Office. He wrote two books about St George – 'St George's in the East' and 'Houses and People of St. George'. [More...](#)